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ABSTRACT

Twenty suggestions are given to help university sociology departments develop procedures for hiring good teachers in the field. The first five ideas are about publicizing the position and initial screening of applications. Jobs should be announced in professional journals and at graduate departments with good reputations. Standardized forms should be sent to applicants asking them to describe their teaching experience, plans, and qualifications. In initial screening, candidates who give specific evidence of teaching expertise or training are the best. Seven suggestions about the final screening process emphasize acquisition of additional background information from applicants and screening by a variety of faculty members and students. Persons contacted for job references should be asked to comment on the candidate's teaching performance. Eight concluding suggestions are made for interviewing prospective teachers. These stress the usefulness of having candidates interviewed by a cross section of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as by faculty and teaching/learning specialists. Candidates should be asked how they would organize certain courses and how they would handle hypothetical situations. They might be asked to prepare a sample classroom presentation. Information concerning the institutional and departmental resources available to teachers should be provided for all candidates. (AV)

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ON TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE SOCIOLOGY

a project of the american sociological association

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT GROUP

20 Suggestions for Improving the Departmental Procedures for Hiring Teachers of Sociology

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By

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Although sociology departments all face the problem of hiring new faculty members, few departments have developed systematic guidelines or procedures for assessing the teaching competence of these job applicants. Thus below are listed some suggestions for developing procedures with regard to hiring good teachers in sociology. Circumstances obviously differ across departments and, consequently, these guidelines are meant only to serve as suggestions of the types of procedures that might be applicable in your department. We hope that you will talk this problem over with others in your department and that you will formulate procedures for hiring good sociology teachers that are applicable to your specific circumstances. If you develop

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additional ideas that you think might be useful to other departments, please write us about them and we will include them in future revisions of this handout.

Some Suggested Procedures

Nothing is more important in determining the overall quality of instruction in a department than the hiring of good teachers. In isolated instances good teachers can be hired through accident or good fortune, but as a long term process, the hiring of good sociology teachers requires organization and hard work. Below are thus described some systematic procedures and guidelines that can be developed at each of the major stages of the hiring process.

Publicizing the Position and the Initial Screening of Job Vita

For most departments, the hiring process begins with publicizing the position, collecting the vita of job applicants, and screening these vita in order to select those of potentially good job candidates. Below are listed some suggestions regarding these important first steps in the hiring process:

1. In the initial screening of job vitas, look for candidates who give specific evidence of teaching expertise or training (e.g., experience as a graduate teaching assistant, courses taught, courses or workshops in teaching methods, participation in the Section on Undergraduate Education, teaching experience in adult education or educational extension programs, work in educational reform movements).

2. Develop standardized forms that are routinely sent to job applicants asking them to describe their teaching experiences and qualifications.

3. In publicizing the position, make it clear that teaching qualifications are one basis for the final selection among job candidates and invite all applicants for the position to present specific information about the nature of their past teaching experience and training, their future teaching plans, and their thoughts about the nature and purpose of teaching sociology.

4. Directly solicit job applications from those graduate departments that have developed teacher preparation programs and have good reputations for training graduate students as teachers.

5. Advertise the job opening in publications that are likely to be read by those applicants most interested in teaching (e.g., Chronicle of Higher Education, Footnotes, Newsletter of the Section on Undergraduate Education).

The Final Screening Process

Having selected from the total number of job applicants those who best

qualify for the position, it is important that the department now have complete information on these remaining candidates' teaching experiences and qualifications. Below are some suggestions regarding additional information that may be needed concerning these job candidates who are to be considered seriously for the teaching position:

6. As a regular procedure in the department, assign a faculty member or committee the responsibility of obtaining information related to the teaching competence of each job candidate seriously considered for a teaching position in the department. These or other faculty members might also be asked to familiarize themselves with some of the relevant literature concerning the evaluation of teaching.

7. Ask candidates who are to be given serious consideration for a position in the department to supply more detailed information about their teaching competence (past teaching experience and training, how concretely they would organize various courses, what are their actual teaching plans for the next few years, how their general philosophy of teaching is reflected in the teaching procedures they will use, etc.).

8. Ask candidates to send any course syllabi, teaching exercises, research relating to teaching (published or unpublished), work by students, student course evaluations, or other written materials that relate to the quality of their teaching.

9. Ask candidates to include among their references those persons who are the most familiar with their past teaching performance.

10. All persons listed as job references can be asked to include in their letters of recommendation a section concerning the teaching competence of the candidate. These persons can also be asked to make their letters as specific as possible, indicating the basis of the evaluation of the candidate's teaching as well as the evaluation itself. These persons could be asked specific questions such as "with what types of students do you think the candidate will be most effective as a teacher," or "what types or levels of courses do you think the candidate can best handle?"

11. If an interview in the department is anticipated with the candidate s/he can be asked before this interview to organize a classroom presentation or discussion. This presentation or discussion could be arranged before a regular class (with evaluations from the instructor and students) or before an artificially created class involving various faculty members (and/or students) in the department.

12. If the candidate has no prior teaching experience, inform her/him that they--along with other candidates for the position--will be asked questions concerning their views about teaching and the approaches that they would anticipate using if they were to teach in the department.

Interviewing Prospective Teachers

If the department is able to interview prospective teachers then addi-

tional information can be obtained regarding their teaching performance:

13. Certain faculty members (or a committee) can be assigned a special responsibility during the candidate's visit to the department of obtaining information relating to her/his teaching competence.

14. In individual interviews or in larger departmental discussions, candidates can be asked to talk about how they would organize various courses, their future teaching plans, their thoughts about the nature and purpose of teaching sociology, or how the specific teaching techniques that they plan to use relate to their more general philosophies regarding the teaching of sociology.

15. Arrange for a cross-section of undergraduate and graduate students to talk with candidates about their teaching and write reports to the department regarding their evaluations.

16. Have faculty members and students evaluate the general communication skills of candidates in the interview situation (how well candidates listen, present thoughts and ideas, show respect for the ideas of students, deal with conflict, etc.).

17. Have candidates interviewed by teaching/learning specialists and have these specialists make written reports to the department concerning their evaluations of candidates' teaching abilities.

18. Ask candidates how they would handle various hypothetical classroom situations (e.g., discussion groups where no one wants to talk, groups where one student monopolizes the discussion, situations where some students persistently come to class late disrupting the lectures, etc.).

19. Ask candidates to make a classroom presentation or lead a group discussion. As mentioned above, this presentation or discussion could either be arranged before a regular class or before an artificially created class involving various faculty members (and/or students) in the department.

20. Inform candidates that the department wants and expects good teaching and try to provide them with as much information as possible concerning the institutional and departmental resources available for teachers. In this regard, it might be helpful to arrange for an informal meeting between candidates and some undergraduate and/or graduate students, without any other faculty members present, so that they can learn more about what teaching is really like in the department.

(If you have comments or suggestions to make regarding these procedures, please write to:)

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